

It was a crowded house at the 24th Annual Georgia Bar Media and Judiciary Conference on February 27. More than 200 judges, lawyers, journalism students, and media representatives were on hand at the State Bar of Georgia's headquarters in Atlanta to commiserate about recurring and emerging first amendment issues and the law.

Citizens, Journalists, and the Police

The day began with an examination of how social media and technology have changed both reporting and policing. Bill Nigut, Senior Executive Producer, Georgia Public Broadcasting, moderated the panel that consisted of Sen. Vincent Fort, Assistant Chief Joseph Spillane, Atlanta Police Department; Ms. Amber Robinson, Assistant City Attorney, City of Atlanta; and Tom Clyde, Kilpatrick Townsend. Much of the discussion revolved around the use of police body cameras.

What benefit is there of body cameras for the police? Where third-party footage of an incident shows an objective or wide view of an incident, the body camera will show the officer's perspective.

Questions arose as to whether police departments would release body camera recordings when requested or would denials be made of Open Records Request while a determination of prosecution was under consideration in a police-involved shooting. The panelists concluded that most likely an all-or-nothing policy would cover the release of body camera footage.

Double Jeopardy for Athletes?

Another panel discussed sports and the law. This panel hashed out the double jeopardy professional athletes face when they are accused of criminal offenses. Mr. Ron Thomas, Director of the Journalism and Sports Program, Morehouse College, and Mr. Jonathan Ringel, Managing Editor, Daily Report, led a panel composed of Brian Jordan, former Atlanta Falcons and Atlanta Braves player, D. Orlando Ledbetter, sports writer for the AJC, and Mr. Wm. David Cornwell, sports attorney.

Who has authority over athletes? courts, commissioners, or both? was the question posed by this panel. When a professional athlete is arrested, unlike most, they are subject not only to police authorities, but also to the commissioners of their sports who can impose sanctions ranging from fines to years-long suspensions.

Mr. Jordan, a two-sport professional athlete, explained the structures of Major League Baseball and the National Football League. Mr. Ledbetter recounted his work on the Michael Vick dog-fighting story and Mr. Cornwell mentioned several high profile cases he has litigated or steered-away from litigation while simultaneously dealing with sports commissioners.

Communicating between journalists, judges, and lawyers

Why won't judges discuss a case before them? What holds them back from letting journalists know what is going on in their courtrooms? A panel of one Supreme Court Justice and two judges answered that question in this breakout session. Justice Carol W. Hunstein, Supreme Court of Georgia; Judge Susan Edlein, State Court of Fulton County; and Senior Superior Court Judge James Bodiford sat down to discuss why communicating to journalists and lawyers is

limited and why your camera may not be allowed in the courtroom.

While the courts have a duty to educate the public on the courts, the judges explained, they also are constrained by the state's judicial canons, especially regarding on-going cases.

Judge Bodiford explained that while courtrooms in Georgia are open, journalists must file a Rule 22 request to have their cameras present. With the advent of smart phones and social media platforms like Twitter, judges are aware of the possibility of images being released without the court's permission.

Who polices the media?

The media polices the media, that's who. Josh White, Education Editor at the Washington Post, delivered a lunch-time session on the Rolling Stone article about rape of the University of Virginia campus that turned out to be false.

Other panels presented included Open Government: Tools for Public Access and How to Most Effectively Use Them; Scrubbing History or Protecting Privacy; Georgia Civil Rights Cold Cases Project; Don't Take My Child, a Fred-Friendly exploration on how investigating child abuse allegations work; and Drones, how drones are being used as a reporting tool.

The 2015 Bar Media and Judiciary Conference was sponsored by the ACLU of Georgia, the Administrative Office of the Courts, the Atlanta Journal Constitution, Bryan Cave, LLP; CNN; Council of Juvenile Court Judges; Council of State Court Judges; Council of Superior Court Judges; Counts Law Group; Daily Report; Georgia First Amendment Foundation; Institute of Continuing Judicial Education; Jones Day; Kennesaw State University Department of Communication; Kilpatrick Townsend & Stockton, LLP; McKenna Long & Aldridge, LLP; State Bar of Georgia; and WSB-TV.